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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6580
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEHDX/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 0723
RUEABND/DEA HQS WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 000410

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/23/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SNAR](#) [RS](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: FOCUSING OUR EFFORTS TO ENGAGE RUSSIA ON
AFGHANISTAN

REF: MOSCOW 00239

Classified By: Ambassador John Beyrle for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Cooperation on Afghanistan remains a top item on the U.S.-Russia agenda. We have achieved success in gaining Russia's public, rhetorical support for our efforts (despite private skepticism) and concrete help on transit issues. Efforts to have Russia contribute substantial economic and military assistance have stalled. Going forward, Embassy Moscow recommends concentrating on three priorities: strategic-level dialogue; counternarcotics cooperation; and transit. Focusing on these three areas will better leverage Russia's concerns about Afghanistan and give us the best chance for successfully achieving our objectives. Russian economic or military assistance may be possible, but we should not have exaggerated expectations. End summary.

Improved Tone, Limited Capabilities

¶2. (C) Russia's posture towards international stabilization efforts in Afghanistan has continued to improve during recent months thanks to the overall improvement in U.S.-Russian relations and high-level attention from SRAP Holbrooke and other senior officials. The Russian attitude has paid dividends: improved implementation of the over-flight agreement, cooperation on improving UNSCR 1267 and a more positive public tone on counternarcotics issues.

¶3. (C) Despite these advances, Russia's ability and willingness to participate in Afghanistan is limited by three factors. Although the GOR shares our perception of the dangers posed by an unstable Afghanistan, many senior officials are skeptical about the prospects for American success and believe the GOR should avoid associating too closely with our efforts. Second, Russia's ambition to transition from an aid-recipient to an aid-donor country remains largely an aspiration. GOR institutions are not yet able to deliver development assistance abroad, let alone in an environment as challenging as Afghanistan. Finally, the memories of the Soviet experience in Afghanistan remain raw, making the GOR (particularly the military and security forces) skittish about anything suggesting a military contribution. As a result, Russia prefers an arms-length approach, such as support for transit, donations through international relief agencies and the use of private companies on a fee-for-services basis.

Synergy: U.S. Goals and Russian Interests

14. (C) Given these limitations, Embassy Moscow recommends focusing our efforts with Russia on three priorities:

--Strategic-level dialogue. To the extent possible, we should treat Russia as a senior partner and consult with them prior to announcing key decisions. The recent visit by Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) Director Kerlikowske, which led to a narrowing of differences on counter-narcotics strategy, highlighted the value of this approach.

--Counternarcotics. Given Russia's deep concern about this issue, U.S.-Russian cooperation in interdicting drug trafficking on Afghanistan's periphery or enhancement of Afghanistan's indigenous counternarcotics capabilities is a win-win for both Russia and Afghanistan.

--Transit. While the Northern Distribution Network and overflights are functioning better, we can make additional improvements to serve ISAF better.

15. (C) These priorities unite Russia's interests/capabilities with top U.S. priorities. While we should remain open to opportunities for military equipment donations and economic development assistance, we should understand that such aid will be modest -- any value would be largely symbolic with minimal impact on the ground in Afghanistan. In this regard, we should encourage the GIROA to approach the GOR directly to double-track assistance requests in order to foster improved Kabul-Moscow communication and to demonstrate to Russia that Kabul values

MOSCOW 00000410 002 OF 003

it as a partner.

Strategic-Level Dialogue

16. (C) Beginning with the July 2009 Presidential Statement on Afghanistan, we have seen the benefits of strategic-level dialogue on Afghanistan. Presidential impetus enabled us to conclude the over-flight agreement. Subsequent Moscow visits by NSA Jones and SRAP Holbrooke gave the Russians an advance look at the soon-to-be-released Afghanistan and Pakistan strategy, raising the level of confidence on which to build further cooperation.

17. (C) We have an opportunity to continue this effort in 2010 as regional diplomacy intensifies following the London Conference. During DSRAP Jones' March visit to Moscow, we recommend extending invitations to DFM Borodavkin and Russian SRAP Kabulov to visit Washington. When Russian Federal Drug Control Service (FSKN) Director Ivanov visits Washington mid-year, he should meet with SRAP Holbrooke. Additionally, at every opportunity, talking points on Afghanistan should continue to be included in Presidential- and Ministerial-level meetings. Finally, we should consider marking the July anniversary of the joint statement with a second bilateral Presidential statement on Afghanistan, noting our successes and how we plan to cooperate in the future.

Counternarcotics

18. (C) As of October 2009, the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimates that roughly 30 percent of Afghanistan's heroin exports go through the "Northern Route", with a total of 75-80 metric tons consumed in Russia itself. GOR officials claim Afghan heroin kills over 30,000 Russians annually and that Afghan exports have increased eight-fold since the fall of the Taliban. For domestic reasons, these statistics provide irresistible temptation for some Russian leaders to assign blame for their domestic drug addiction problem to Afghanistan and -- by extension -- the

U.S. FSKN Director Viktor Ivanov and others have regularly beat this drum and will likely do so in the future. Regular, high-level dialogue with the GOR (including the Duma and Federation Council) on our Afghan counternarcotics strategy will help reduce the frequency of such statements. ONDCP Director Kerlikowske's commitment to monitor the effects of our counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan on drug flow into Russia was a welcome gesture and consultation should continue regularly.

¶9. (C) Director Kerlikowske's visit also facilitated enhanced cooperation on interdiction of drugs in Central Asia and the prosecution of drug traffickers and financiers. In addition to the names of eight Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) DEA provided to their Russian counterparts, we should look for additional avenues of information and intelligence sharing, such as the participation of a Russian official in the Afghan Finance Threat Center and encouraging stepped-up Russian participation in CARICC. Russia will likely continue to press for U.S. and NATO counternarcotics cooperation with the CSTO; our position should be that we are open to counternarcotics proposals from CSTO while deflecting Russia's desire for formal recognition of the organization. The Drug Trafficking working group of the Bilateral Presidential Commission will play a key role. This forum provides an opportunity for real cooperation in law enforcement and intelligence sharing, not only at senior levels but also at the working level. The recent decision to include the Counternarcotics Financing Sub-Working Group under the Drug Trafficking group demonstrates the commitment by both sides to make this working group an effective forum for results-oriented law-enforcement.

¶10. (C) Finally, we should encourage the GOR to increase its support for training Afghan security and counternarcotics forces in Russia and Central Asia. Winning GOR buy-in for more OSCE projects, possibly inside Afghanistan, is also possible in the coming year.

Transit

MOSCOW 00000410 003 OF 003

¶11. (C) Both air and rail transit are broadly recognized as successful areas of cooperation, despite the continuing challenges we face implementing the over-flight agreement. Depending on DOD needs, we believe expanded our cooperation in both of these areas is possible.

¶12. (C) On air transit, we now are averaging about one flight per day under the agreement. We expect to resolve the ICAO standards issue (reftel) in the near term, allowing charter flights to carry hazardous cargo in the same way military flights now do. We believe Moscow would be receptive to opening polar routes; while the current routes create savings of approximately 25-40 minutes on each trip, using polar routes would typically save 2-3 hours per flight, and in some cases could save as much as 15 hours. Second, we are working with the GOR to streamline processing for clearances and increasing the clearance window from 24 to 72 hours in certain circumstances, making the clearances more flexible to changes or delays.

¶13. (C) The current arrangement allowing commercial rail shipment of non-hazardous materials via the Northern Distribution Network through Russian territory operates effectively and is being expanded to use the Trans-Siberian route from the Pacific in addition to cargo shipped through Europe. The next step is to approach the Russians requesting the ability to use this route to transport certain categories of hazardous materials. We understand that work is ongoing to determine which items would be included and such requests are also being coordinated with the Central Asian

governments. We believe that seeking an amendment to the existing NATO-Russia rail agreement offers the best path to success.

Comment

¶14. (C) Cooperation on Afghanistan has emerged as one of the most visible successes of the "reset" of U.S.-Russian relations during the past year. To build effectively on this foundation in ways that will materially advance our goals in Afghanistan, we should concentrate efforts on transit, where we have a track record, and counter-narcotics, Russia's number one priority. These efforts and our regional diplomacy goals will be well served by continued strategic-level dialogue. All three of these prongs will gain Russian buy-in for more activities that help make Central Asia a force for political stability and economic growth along Afghanistan's northern tier.

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